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## Book Review- *Nebraska Bird Review* (March 1991)

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*Nebraska Ornithologists' Union*

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### BOOK REVIEWS

Dan O'Brien. *The Rites of Autumn: A Falconer's Journey Across the American West*.  
New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1988. 192 pp. \$9.95.

The reintroduction of animals into the wild is difficult and, at times, seemingly futile work. A tiny fraction of those actually released live long enough to reach full adulthood, and an even smaller number actually survive to breed. Dan O'Brien has worked since 1965 at the frustrating task of reintroducing young peregrine falcons to the mountains of the western United States. His new book, *The Rites of Autumn*, is an autobiographical account of his dedication to this Herculean job. Travelling from Montana to the Gulf of Mexico, O'Brien's narrative traces the fall migration route of the Peregrine Falcon in a last attempt to teach a young falcon how to be wild.

O'Brien begins his story in the mountains of Montana as his three-person team attempts to release four fledgling falcons into the wild as part of a propagation and "hacking" or reintroduction program. Unfortunately, three of those four birds are lost to a wandering Golden Eagle. The last, whom O'Brien names Dolly, is recaptured and adopted by O'Brien, who decides to play the roles of both falconer

and mother. He will try to teach Dolly how to hunt her natural prey along what would be her natural migratory route.

Up to this point in his career, O'Brien has only published fictional works--Eminent Domain and Spirit of the Hills. The descriptive skill of a fiction writer, however, transfers smoothly into his new book. He clearly has a passion for the outdoors and the birds he cares for, investing both with a wildness and grandeur that reflect his deep respect for both. His landscapes are as expansive as Dolly's eyes are expressive. At the same time, O'Brien's sharp social commentary and introspective digressions allow the reader a personal investment in Dolly's progress. So, while Dolly's wildness must ultimately be contained, O'Brien's writing permits his audience intimate contact with her brief taste of freedom.

---Lysbeth Benkert, Dept. of English, Washington State  
University, Pullman, WA 99164-5020

Edward Duensing. *Talking to Fireflies, Shrinking the Moon: A Parent's Guide to Nature Activities*. New York: New American Library, 1990. 96 pp. \$7.95.

The book has 35 short chapters on items pertaining to nature and suggestions as to how they can be presented in a way that will be interesting to children. It is interesting just for the reading and should be helpful to anyone who wants to interest children in nature.

---R.G. Cortelyou, 5109 Underwood Ave., Omaha, NE  
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